United Nations E/2012/15

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
16 April 2012

Original: English

Substantive session of 2012
New York, 2-27 July 2012
Item 10 of the provisional agenda*
Regional cooperation

Regional cooperation in the economic, social and related fields

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

While many countries across the different regions have experienced economic growth, the growth in gross domestic product (GDP) has not always translated into job creation, especially for the youth population. In the aftermath of the global economic crisis, youth unemployment levels have increased in many countries, including developed countries. The increase in the global youth unemployment rate has been higher than the global adult unemployment rate, which strengthens the premise that young people are most vulnerable to economic shocks. Governments need to invest in empowering youth with the requisite knowledge and skills. Education and training systems and opportunities need to better match modern demands in the labour market to facilitate school-to-work transitions. In the interest of inclusiveness and sustainability, there is an increasing need to cater to greener and better jobs along with the decent work agenda.

In recent decades, there has been an acceleration in regional integration and cooperation processes and a proliferation of regional agreements and initiatives, including in the area of sustainable development. Many regional organizations, supported by the United Nations regional commissions and other United Nations system agencies, are mainstreaming the sustainable development agenda into their development frameworks. The regional initiatives have been shaped taking into account regional needs and specificities, and include overarching regional frameworks to implement agreed global strategies for sustainable development; norms and standard-setting processes on issues relating to the environment; and sharing of knowledge and good practices on sustainable development.[1]

* E/2012/100.

[1] The data and analyses contained in this report are obtained mainly from sources provided by the regional commissions.

12-29696 (E) 100512

Please recycle

The present report is submitted to the Economic and Social Council in accordance with General Assembly resolution 1823 (XVII) and Council resolution 1817 (LV), and is structured in two parts. In the first part, the report examines youth and development issues in the context of promoting productive capacity, employment and decent work, and inclusive economic growth. It also highlights the importance of regional cooperation in promoting an integrated approach to sustainable development. The second part of the report covers developments in selected areas of regional and interregional cooperation, including additional policy matters addressed during the regional commission ministerial sessions, efforts to promote coherence at the regional level, including through the Regional Coordination Mechanisms convened by the regional commissions as mandated by the Council, cooperation with non-United Nations regional organizations to promote development, and ongoing interregional cooperation among the regional commissions through the production of joint analytical products, the hosting of joint events and the implementation of joint projects, as part of their efforts in promoting South-South cooperation.

Contents

		Page
I.	Regional perspectives on the global agenda	3
	A. Youth and development: promoting productive capacity, employment and decent work, and inclusive economic growth	3
	B. Overview of the situation prevailing in the different regions	3
	C. Regional cooperation on promoting an integrated approach to sustainable development	9
II.	Developments in selected areas of regional and interregional cooperation	15
	A. Additional policy issues addressed by the regional commissions at their ministerial sessions and other high-level meetings	15
	B. Coherence at the regional level	17
	C. Interregional cooperation among the regional commissions	21

I. Regional perspectives on the global agenda

A. Youth and development: promoting productive capacity, employment and decent work, and inclusive economic growth

Background

1. While many countries across the different regions have experienced economic growth, the growth in gross domestic product (GDP) has not always translated into job creation, especially for the youth population. In the aftermath of the global economic crisis, youth unemployment levels have increased in many countries, including developed countries. The increase in the global youth unemployment rate has been higher than the global adult unemployment rate, which strengthens the premise that youth are most vulnerable to economic shocks. An estimated 75.1 million young people were out of work at the end of 2010, and youth unemployment rose by almost 1 percentage point during the period 2008-2009.[2]

2. The economic crisis has had a deep impact on youth unemployment in developed countries, where youth unemployment is at its highest levels since 1991, when the measurements were first instituted, and is continuing to show an upward trend (youth unemployment increased by 4.6 percentage points in the period 2008-2010).[3]

3. Despite the high levels of youth unemployment in the developed countries, the majority of the world's youth population live in the developing world, where a significant proportion of young people in many regions are still having difficultly finding a job. Even when employed, they are in vulnerable jobs, mainly in the informal sector. Fundamental structural issues affect their access to decent jobs. In low-income economies, the youth population has had to deal with jobless growth with minimal job creation in the formal sector, coupled with weak aggregate demand. The absence of social safety nets means that young people have to make a living under extremely poor conditions and continue to be in poverty even when they are employed. As per International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates, young people account for a disproportionately large share of the world's working poor (23.5 per cent).

4. The frustration and anger of young people at not finding decent employment has been a major contributing factor to the youth-led political and social movements and uprisings in the Arab region. While many elements and trends are common across regions, there are significant variations among regions in terms of the causes and impact of youth unemployment and effective ways to address them.

B. Overview of the situation prevailing in the different regions

Africa

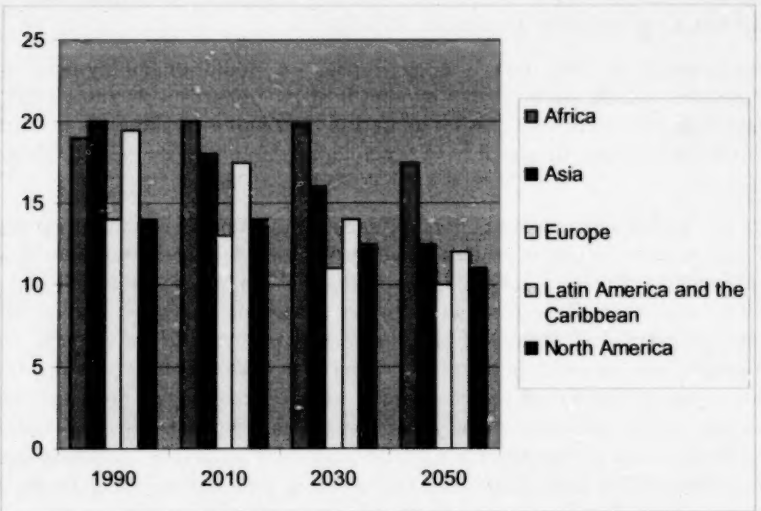
5. The proportion of the youth population as a percentage of the total population has been higher in Africa than in other world regions, and will continue to be so up to 2050 (see the figure below). Investing in African youth has implications not only

[2] International Labour Office, *Global Employment Trends for Youth: 2011 update*, Geneva, October 2011.

[3] Ibid.

for social and economic development; it also puts into focus the urgent need for a critical understanding of evolving opportunities and challenges that young people face in the world today. High-quality and demand-driven education that enhances innovation and the employability of young people, together with a labour market that is receptive to large numbers of young people, are imperative for many African countries. In order to be competitive and have a chance of finding gainful employment at the national, regional or global levels, African youth have to acquire knowledge and skills through basic and higher education, including technical and vocational training. Governments in Africa should therefore begin investing more in post-primary education in order to sustain the gains made over the past decade with high enrolment in primary education.

Comparison of proportion of youth population as a percentage of the total population (in per cent)



Source: *African Youth Report, 2011*.

6. Many young women are not able to enter the labour market easily or have to leave earlier because of prejudices and limitations, thereby reducing the labour force participation rates for young women. Young persons with disabilities, young refugees and young migrant workers also face similar barriers. Taking into account the social and political implications of having a body of uneducated and unemployed youth and the need to empower the youth of Africa to compete in a globalized world, several initiatives have been taken at the regional level (see box 1 below).

Box 1
Regional initiatives to promote youth development in Africa

Regional initiatives to promote youth development in Africa include the 2000 Dakar Framework for Action on Education for All, the African Union Plan of Action for the Second Decade of Education for Africa (2006-2015) and the African Youth Charter, all of which comprehensively take into account issues relating to education and employment as well as issues affecting African youth in the diaspora, as a demonstration of political will to support youth policies and programmes at the highest level. The regional initiatives require all stakeholders to work together in devising strategies, policies and programmes that would enable African youth to be a productive and competitive force for the development of Africa. According to the *African Youth Report, 2011*, efforts to address employment issues and challenges faced by young people are of crucial importance and should be linked with general labour market measures and strategies. In addition, Governments need to adopt macroeconomic policies that encourage overall economic and employment growth with prudent social development considerations.

Economic Commission for Europe region

7. Youth unemployment averaged about 18 per cent in 2011 in most areas of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) region, but is considerably higher than that in many economies. For example, it exceeds 20 per cent in over half of the European Union members and is close to 50 per cent in Greece and Spain. Youth unemployment is especially high for migrants, the disabled, and ethnic and racial minorities. In the advanced European economies, unemployment of young men is higher than that for young women, while in the emerging European economies, the opposite is true.

8. Although education and training are primary factors explaining long-term economic growth, expenditures in these areas have been reduced in many ECE economies owing to austerity packages implemented to reduce sovereign debt. In the transition economies, school systems and training programmes are still not fully adapted to the job needs of a market economy. Numerous ECE economies implemented policies that provide a subsidy or differential benefit for hiring young people. However, these programmes often did not work as projected since they did not create net employment but simply reduced the number of permanent well-paying jobs with temporary low-paying jobs.

9. In the ECE region, labour policy and the provision of decent jobs for young people are largely considered to be policies that should be addressed at the national level. The 1997 Amsterdam Treaty states that employment is a matter of common concern and leaves it up to national Governments to design and implement specific policies to achieve the targets. Box 2 below highlights a number of regional initiatives in support of national policies.

Box 2
Supporting national actions through regional cooperation

The European Union has supported national policies by highlighting good practices and providing financial support for funds, including the European Social Fund, the European Regional Development Fund and the European Fund for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals. Europe 2020, a 10-year strategy proposed in 2010 for the promotion of sustainable and inclusive growth, sets forth several targets concerned specifically with employment issues. A Youth Opportunities Initiative has been proposed to help member States achieve the 2020 targets, along with a New Skills for New Jobs Initiative to improve the match between labour market needs and education and training skills.

Latin America and the Caribbean

10. Employment and unemployment rates in Latin America and the Caribbean showed significant improvements between 2000 and 2009 for young people aged 15 to 29, with the former rising from 36 per cent in 2000 to 54 per cent in 2009, and the latter declining from 16 per cent to 13 per cent during the same period. Although better educated than former generations, young people face difficulties in entering the work world at the appropriate time.

11. The region continues to face many challenges. The urban unemployment rate is over twice as high as the rural rate for young people aged 25 to 29, and the gender gaps in employment rates remain particularly worrying. There are also specific groups that face special difficulties in accessing employment, such as young people with low educational levels, young women in traditional homes where roles are rigidly distributed, young people who are neither studying nor working, and ethnic minorities.

12. The challenge is to work towards more equal opportunities for young people from different family-income levels and residence zones and with different ethnic identities, and to complement progress in education with policies that reinforce the links in the transition from education to employment. This could be done through programmes facilitating access to a first job, training and skill certification. Governments need to take measures to strengthen the institutional framework governing the labour market and to develop tools to ensure that the labour market functions properly and protects its weakest participants. Some of the key priorities of the region for achieving comprehensive youth development are highlighted in box 3 below.

Box 3
Priorities for the Latin America and Caribbean region

The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) is working closely with member States and regional organizations to address the following key priorities for the Latin America and Caribbean region: (a) combining education and training needs with skill recognition and practical employment opportunities for young people; (b) greater investment to improve the quality of vocational training and support for low-income youth entrepreneurs; (c) adapting training to new labour market demands; (d) technical change and participation by multiple actors. It is also essential to help youth entrepreneurs to set up microenterprises or small businesses that are sustainable over time by providing access to financing, information and networks, since much of the employment generated in the region today is provided by small enterprises.

Asia-Pacific

13. In the Asia-Pacific region, the total youth population peaked at 760 million in 2010. However, the share of young people in the total population is expected to decrease from 18 per cent to 11 per cent by the end of the century. Such a substantial fall in the share of young people has a number of potential negative impacts on society, namely labour shortages, skills gaps, high dependency ratios and low economic growth.

14. Many young people in the region are particularly vulnerable, since they are engaged in informal employment, in low-paid, low-productive and hazardous jobs with no or very limited forms of social protection. Across the region, about 47 million young people are looking for jobs, with regional youth unemployment rates averaging three to five times higher that the rates for the adult population. The young-women-to-adult unemployment ratio is often even higher than that of young men. In numerous cases, increased rates of youth unemployment, inactivity and lack of influence are associated with higher levels of social risks and crime, greater delinquency and distrust in many social and economic policies.

15. To address the above challenges, Governments need to invest in providing young people with the requisite knowledge and skills, including life skills. Education and training systems and opportunities need to better match modern demands in the labour market to facilitate school-to-work transitions. In the interest of inclusiveness and sustainability, there is an increasing need to cater to greener and better jobs along with the decent work agenda.

16. There is an acute need to address gender disparities in terms of labour participation rates, wages, leadership and access to education, in South and South-West Asia in particular. Occupational segregation and a lower value placed on women's economic contributions, lack of inheritance and property rights, and lower access to credit and capital place young women at a greater disadvantage in the labour market. Employment and economic policies as well as legal and regulatory systems need to take into account particular constraints faced by young women in the labour market and as potential entrepreneurs. Some of the regional initiatives to

promote youth development in the region, which are supported by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), are highlighted in box 4 below.

Box 4
Subregional frameworks for youth development

Regional and subregional frameworks tailor global norms to regional specificities and provide guidance for action at the national level. For example, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has a framework of cooperation mechanisms for youth policy development, which includes promoting the employability of youth, and information exchange and partnership. Similarly, the Pacific youth strategy provides the regional framework for youth development in the Pacific subregion, including through integrated education; sustainable livelihoods; promoting healthy lifestyles; strengthening youth capacity and identities; and collecting data on youth. The United Nations system works closely with the subregional organizations and provides technical support for the implementation of the frameworks.

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia region

17. The Arab region, covered by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), is undergoing a demographic transition from high to low birth and death rates, which is leading to an age-structural transition and a reshaping of the population pyramid. In 2010, one out of every five persons in the region was young adult aged 15 to 24 years. This youth bulge is opening a demographic window of opportunity for increasing savings, investment rates and per capita income, and ultimately improving the quality of life. However, it could also impose several challenges in countries where young people are confronted by social exclusion, unemployment and deprivation. According to ILO data spanning a period of 20 years, approximately one in four young adults in the labour market remains unemployed in the Middle East and North Africa region, despite the progress made in education for both girls and boys.

18. Key challenges posed by globalization associated with existing conditions in the labour market in the Arab region include (a) the rapid changes in required skills that have not been matched by appropriate changes in education; and (b) the establishment of branches of multinational companies that tend to employ cheap foreign labour, often from other regions. Those developments have led to instability of employment of young people, since many enterprises offer temporary work which in turn, limits the opportunities for young people to start a family or participate in community life. Generating jobs requires macroeconomic and structural policies that reduce overall unemployment, coupled with education, training and apprenticeship programmes that increase the productivity of young people and make them more employable, and policies that provide subsidies or differential benefits for hiring youth. Young people must be central to any policy for development implemented in the ESCWA region. Regional cooperation on sharing lessons learned and harmonizing key economic and social policies are important. Some of the regional initiatives in this area are outlined in box 5 below.

Box 5

Regional cooperation in the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia region

ESCWA works with the League of Arab States to emphasize the role, strengthening and empowerment of Arab youth. For this purpose, a League of Arab States youth forum is held annually. ESCWA also works with the League to support member States in developing and adopting long-term policies to promote youth development. These policies include improving the quality of education at the primary and higher levels; better matching the outputs of the educational system with labour market needs; exploring the potential offered by an emerging green economy in the region for job creation, particularly for young people; and encouraging broad-based entrepreneurship to create and exploit new sustainable economic possibilities.

C. Regional cooperation on promoting an integrated approach to sustainable development

19. In recent decades, there has been an acceleration in regional integration and cooperation processes and a proliferation of regional agreements and initiatives whose scope has widened beyond traditional areas such as trade to cover other aspects, including, inter alia, the environment, migration and food security. This rapid growth in regional and subregional cooperation, integration and institutions, has also been observed in the area of sustainable development, where measures required for the integration of the pillars of sustainable development have emerged as a critical area for regional cooperation, especially in the context of the negotiations leading up to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20).

20. Cognizant of the ongoing processes at the global level, many regional organizations, supported by the regional commissions and other United Nations system agencies, are trying to mainstream the sustainable development agenda into their development frameworks. The regional initiatives have been shaped taking into account regional needs and specificities, and include overarching regional frameworks to implement agreed global strategies on sustainable development; norms and standard-setting processes on issues relating to the environment; mechanisms for sharing knowledge and good practices on sustainable development; processes for assessing progress towards the implementation of sustainable development strategies; and providing regional voices in respect of global processes on sustainable development. Some illustrative examples of regional cooperation from different regions are given below.

Africa

21. In Africa, the existence of pan-regional groupings such as the African Union and its New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) programme, supported by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) provides a strong regional platform for the implementation of regional cooperation initiatives on sustainable development. ECA works in close partnership with the African Union and the African

Development Bank (AfDB) to provide analytical and policy-related support to the regional processes and initiatives.

22. The Climate for Development in Africa Initiative (ClimDev-Africa) is an African development programme to integrate climate risk management into relevant policy and decision processes throughout the continent. Established in 2008, it is being implemented under the direction of the joint African Union Commission-ECA-AfDB secretariat with support from a number of sources. The Initiative aims to enhance economic growth and progress towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals by mitigating the vagaries of climate variability and climate change and to ensure that development achievements already gained are climate-resilient in the longer term. It is envisaged as a three-phase programme over an 11-year period. The overall purpose of ClimDev-Africa is to strengthen the climate resilience of economic growth in Africa by mainstreaming climate risk management in sensitive sectors; it fits well with national poverty reduction strategies in Africa and with African Union/NEPAD plans for improved agriculture and food security, disaster risk reduction and environmental action.

Box 6

Climate for Development in Africa Initiative — An example of coordinated complementary actions among partners

The three primary partners in ClimDev-Africa perform complementary functions. ECA hosts the African Climate Policy Centre, which contributes to the development of Africa's climate policy capacity and provides secretariat, administrative and programme management functions for the Initiative. The Climate Change and Desertification Control Unit of the African Union Commission serves as the institutional anchorage for advancing Africa's common position on climate change and provides political leadership within ClimDev-Africa. AfDB has established the ClimDev-Africa Special Fund, which provides a channel for demand-led funding of implementing agencies across Africa for activities that are in line with the achievement of the objectives of the programme. This illustrates the value of strategic partnership among regional stakeholders to promote a common cause.

23. Another good example of regional cooperation in implementing an integrated approach to sustainable development is the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme, a NEPAD agricultural programme that focuses on improving food security and nutrition and increasing incomes in Africa's largely agricultural economies. It aims to do this by implementing four key pillars: (a) sustainable land and water management; (b) improving market access; (c) tackling food supply and hunger; and (d) promoting agricultural research.

24. The Programme has raised the profile of the agricultural sector in national politics in Africa; contributed to purposeful and incentive-oriented agricultural policies; and facilitated marked progress towards donor coordination, harmonization and alignment with country priorities. As a result, in a number of countries, additional resources have been allocated to targeted programmes that have the

highest potential to generate returns on these investments. The United Nations system, development partners and multilateral institutions have also been mobilized around the Programme. ECA, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the World Bank have all provided significant support in the advancement of the Programme.

Asia-Pacific

25. In the Asia-Pacific region, ESCAP assists member States in integrating environmental sustainability in economic and social development, including through the application of the green-growth approach, eco-efficient planning and management of such natural resources as energy and water, and sustainable urban development. ESCAP also facilitates consensus-building among different stakeholders concerning strategies, approaches and cooperation at the regional level to promote an integrated approach to sustainable development.

26. The Commission's green-growth concept has been recognized as one of the key approaches to sustainable development, and when adapted to country-specific circumstances, could concomitantly support rapid economic growth, the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and environmental sustainability. A joint ESCAP, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and Asian Development Bank (ADB) publication entitled *Green Growth, Resources and Resilience* provides an in-depth analysis of the region's specific challenges in achieving sustainable development. Building on this analysis, the low-carbon green-growth road map for the region was launched in April 2012. The road map provides policy suggestions for economic systems change to support the shift to low-carbon green growth, both in the region and at the global scale, and proposes a set of options for policymakers to implement as a way of initiating economic systems change to enhance the region's ability to achieve sustainable development. In addition, since 2007, 700 policymakers and experts from 40 countries in the region have benefited from regional capacity development and training-of-trainers support, through an online e-learning facility, thereby enhancing their skills to develop green-growth policies, tools and strategies.

27. In 2006, the Asia-Pacific Water Forum was launched by the region's water ministers as an effective mechanism to encourage more collaborative efforts on water resources management and to accelerate the integration of such management into the socio-economic development process of the Asia-Pacific region. The region is also challenged by the need to enhance energy security while ensuring the sustainable use of energy to support economic growth and meet the developmental needs of the region. It must also improve access to energy services and promote energy efficiency and the utilization of renewable energy. Against this background, ESCAP is organizing the Asian and Pacific Energy Forum in Vladivostok, Russian Federation, in 2013, with the objective of enhancing regional cooperation on energy security and the sustainable use of energy.

Box 7

Subregional cooperation mechanism to promote environmental sustainability and energy security in North-East Asia

The North-East Asian Subregional Programme for Environmental Cooperation was launched in 1993 as a comprehensive intergovernmental cooperation mechanism comprising six North-East Asian countries,[a] to jointly address environmental challenges in the subregion. ESCAP serves as the secretariat for the programme. Concrete outcomes of the programme include (a) awareness-building regarding clean technology options and their availability; (b) increasing regional monitoring capacities through information and sharing experiences in emission monitoring; (c) emission standards, policies and legislation; and (d) technical and management capacity enhancement of technical personnel and policymakers on pollution control.

[a] China, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Japan, Mongolia, the Republic of Korea and the Russian Federation.

28. The scale and pace of urbanization in the region are unprecedented, and cities now face interconnected challenges regarding environmental sustainability, poverty and increasing vulnerability to climate change and other natural and man-made disasters and crises. CITYNET: Regional Network of Local Authorities for the Management of Human Settlements was set up in 1987 with support from ESCAP, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to help local governments to improve the sustainability of human settlements. Currently, CITYNET has more than 100 members in more than 20 countries, most of which are cities and local governments in the Asia-Pacific region.

Economic Commission for Europe region

29. Many important breakthroughs have been made at the pan-European level in terms of new governance approaches that integrate the three dimensions of sustainable development. These have not only enhanced regional coordination and cooperation, but have also supported deeper integration of sustainability into decision-making at all levels. The "Environment for Europe" process is regarded as an essential high-level political process that provides for a coordinated approach in environmental policy for the entire region. It involves all ECE member States as well as a large number of civil society organizations from the region. Serviced by ECE, this process also benefits from the active involvement of United Nations organizations and other regional entities such as the European Environment Agency, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Council of Europe.

30. Not only has this process been critical to the development of regional conventions and harmonized norms but it has also served to bridge important gaps and facilitate the exchange of experiences between State and non-State actors, which, in turn, has proved essential to policy, law-making and institution-building at

the domestic level. ECE has negotiated five environmental treaties,[4] all of which are now in force. Their governing bodies are serviced by the ECE secretariat, which also helps them to monitor the implementation of the treaties.

Box 8
Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development

ECE is the only region to date with a legally binding instrument for the implementation of Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, namely, the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention). The Convention links environmental rights and human rights, and government accountability and environmental protection. It also focuses on interactions between the public and public authorities in a democratic context.

Latin America and the Caribbean

31. Regional cooperation is a major vehicle for collaboration on the pillars of sustainable development in the Latin America and Caribbean region. A number of regional forums have incorporated sustainable development as part of their core agenda. Analytical and normative support for these processes is provided by the United Nations system, in particular by ECLAC. The Latin American and Caribbean Initiative for Sustainable Development was set up in 2002 with the main objective of assessing progress and coordinating action towards sustainable development in the countries of the region. Towards that end, ECLAC is supporting the development of national environmental, economic, social and institutional indicators required to assess progress in implementing the Initiative.

32. Other important regional forums include the Central American Commission on Environment and Development, established in 1989, which has acquired great importance as a subregional forum for environment ministers or equivalent authorities. Based on joint positions, a series of agreements for the subregion were proposed in such areas as biological diversity, hazardous waste and forests, accompanied by a portfolio of environmental projects and a successful financial strategy. The Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR) has established a sub-working group on the environment. It has adopted a framework agreement on the environment with a corresponding action plan, as well as cooperation initiatives on specific issues.

33. Since its establishment, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) has led projects in such areas as renewable energy development, climate change adaptation and food safety, while the Forum of Ministers of the Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean serves as a forum for dialogue and consensus-building on the environment. ECLAC provides analytical and normative support for the regional

[4] Conventions on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution; Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context; Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes; Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents; and Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters.

processes, including through the production of reports, with the collaboration of the entire United Nations system.

Box 9
Regional cooperation for urban development

The Regional Meeting of Ministers and High-level Authorities of the Housing and Urban Development Sector in Latin America and the Caribbean is the main entity facilitating intergovernmental coordination and cooperation among the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean in the area of sustainable development of human settlements. It has prioritized improving the urban environment and reducing environmental vulnerability as a key focus of its work. At its most recent meeting, held in Asunción, in September 2011, the ministers and high-level authorities agreed to promote a city-level territorial approach to develop, promote and implement improved urban development strategies.

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia region

34. Regional initiatives in the ESCWA region address sustainable development challenges, and respond to member countries' priorities, particularly those relating to climate change mitigation and adaptation, and enhance the efficiency and sustainability of production and consumption patterns in the water, energy and production sectors. ESCWA supports these initiatives and processes in partnership with the League of Arab States, including through a number of coordination avenues, such as the Regional Coordination Mechanism and various networks and projects.

Box 10
Regional cooperation to promote sustainable development in the Arab region

The Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment is the regional mechanism for maintaining coordination and cooperation among the Arab countries in all matters relating to the environment and sustainable development. The recommendations of the Joint Committee on Environment and Development in the Arab Countries are considered by the Council and used as a basis for setting a long-term agenda for an integrated approach to sustainable development in the region. Critical issues that have been under consideration include preparations for the Rio+20 Conference, addressing trade and environment linkages and enhancing sustainable production and consumption patterns. The League of Arab States serves as the technical secretariat for the Council, and is supported by ESCWA and UNEP in this regard.

35. Other regional initiatives include the Arab Ministerial Council for Water, which focuses on the legal framework for shared water resources and impact assessments of climate change on water resources and socio-economic vulnerability

in the Arab region; and the Arab Ministerial Council for Electricity, which focuses on energy efficiency, renewable energy and electrical interconnection projects. ESCWA provides substantive support for these processes.

36. Water resources management in the ESCWA region is addressed through an integrated and transboundary water resources management framework. This framework facilitates the development of national capacities and strategies of member States in respect of the management of shared water resources and is aimed at establishing a regional forum for dialogue and exchange among member countries.

Box 11
Interregional cooperation

All the regional commissions have hosted regional preparatory meetings for Rio+20, which have served to provide a regional voice in the ongoing global negotiations. The outcome documents of the regional meetings highlighted important regional specificities on substantive issues as well as the institutional framework for sustainable development. The regional commissions also serve as important forums for interregional cooperation. For example, they all work within the framework of the Global Energy Efficiency 21 (GEE21) project to foster regional cooperation for improved integrated management of energy efficiency and renewable energy within the five United Nations regional commissions. One of the key outputs under this project is a publication entitled *Financing Global Climate Change Mitigation*.

II. Developments in selected areas of regional and interregional cooperation

A. Additional policy issues addressed by the regional commissions at their ministerial sessions and other high-level meetings

37. The regional commissions actively considered most of the issues highlighted in the first part of the present report at high-level ministerial sessions and other meetings held since the 2011 substantive session of the Economic and Social Council. During the period under consideration, three of the regional commissions, namely ECA, ESCAP and ESCWA, held their annual or biennial ministerial sessions. The details of the outcomes and resolutions adopted in the sessions are contained in addenda 1 and 2 to the present document. ECLAC will hold its thirty-fourth session in San Salvador in August 2012.[5]

38. The forty-fifth session of ECA was held in Addis Ababa from 22 to 27 March 2012 and the Fifth Joint Annual Meetings of the African Union Conference of Ministers of Economy and Finance and ECA Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development was held on 26 and 27 March 2012.

[5] Add.3 will be issued following the session.

The main theme of the Meeting was "Unleashing Africa's potential as a pole of global growth". The discussions covered a wide range of topics relating to financing for development in Africa, climate change and development, the implementation of the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme, and issues relating to the promotion and implementation of coordinated and integrated policy approaches to help unleash balanced and sustainable growth and the development potential of African countries at the local, national and regional levels.

39. The Meeting adopted a ministerial policy statement and a number of resolutions on various issues of importance for the work of ECA and the African Union, including resolutions on unleashing Africa's potential as a pole of global growth; accelerating regional integration and boosting intra-African trade; and the regional dimension of development.

40. The main theme of the twenty-seventh ministerial session of ESCWA, to be held from 7 to 10 May 2012 in Beirut, is "The role of participation and social justice in achieving sustainable and balanced development in the region". The theme will be addressed at a ministerial round table in view of its relevance to the countries of the region. ESCWA will present a conceptual policy framework describing the role of participation and good governance in achieving just, inclusive and sustainable development and highlighting the challenges that Governments face in achieving social justice. The issues of inclusive financing for small and medium-sized enterprises and creating job opportunities will also be tackled at a high-level round table on small and medium-sized enterprises, which lie at the core of private sector development to foster sustainable and inclusive growth.

41. The sixty-eighth session of ESCAP will be held in Bangkok from 17 to 23 May 2012. The main theme of the session is "Enhancing regional economic integration in Asia and the Pacific". A ministerial round table will review the current status and potential of regional economic integration in Asia and the Pacific and examine policy choices for enhancing regional cooperation. A high-level panel on "Steering inclusive development through global turbulences and volatility" will review the region's outlook as it faces a global economic slowdown and assess policy responses to emerging vulnerabilities.

42. At the session, a high-level consultation will be convened for countries in the region to provide their perspectives on global reform issues that will be addressed at the Group of Twenty (G-20) summit in Mexico on 18 and 19 June 2012. The consultation is being held in response to a request by the Commission that the ESCAP secretariat provide a platform to coordinate the voices of developing countries, particularly those that are not part of the G-20, so that their concerns will be heard in global policy discussions.

43. The twenty-sixth session of the Committee of the Whole of ECLAC was held in New York on 28 and 29 March 2012. It provided member States from the region with an opportunity to discuss an overview of the economic and social situation and the outlook for 2012. The participants reviewed a report on the activities of the subsidiary bodies of ECLAC; outcomes of cooperation with intergovernmental and regional integration entities in the region; and the agenda for the forthcoming session of the Commission.

B. Coherence at the regional level

1. Regional Coordination Mechanism

44. The twelfth session of the Regional Coordination Mechanism of the United Nations agencies and organizations working in Africa in support of the African Union and its NEPAD programme, Africa was held on 21 and 22 November 2011 in Addis Ababa on the theme "Capacity-building". It was co-chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General and the Deputy Chair of the African Union Commission. The main recommendations of the session included the need for concrete modalities to ensure coherence and build synergies in capacity-building support for the Commission, its NEPAD programme and the regional economic communities, and the need to develop a road map for drafting a capacity-building programme for the regional economic communities and NEPAD. The Regional Coordination Mechanism also recommended the establishment of a task force to operationalize the Subregional Coordination Mechanism in Eastern and Southern Africa, in consultation with the regional economic communities and intergovernmental organizations in the two subregions, with a view to ensuring coordinated United Nations support for the regional integration agenda of the two subregions.

45. During the reporting period, the clusters of the Regional Coordination Mechanism for Africa improved the alignment of their activities with African Union priorities and NEPAD programmes by developing business plans based on the priorities of African Union institutions. The following clusters and sub-clusters successfully worked with partners to develop their business plans: governance; social and human development; environment, population and urbanization; water, sanitation and hygiene; industry, trade and market access; agriculture, food security and rural development; and advocacy and communications. The business plans have helped to strengthen efforts towards joint programming, with a view to achieving coherence and optimal results.

46. The Regional Coordination Mechanism for the ECE region held two meetings during the reporting period: (a) a formal meeting chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General in October 2011; and (b) an informal meeting in Istanbul in March 2012. One of the main focuses of its work during the period was the development of the report entitled *From Transition to Transformation: Sustainable and Inclusive Development in Europe and Central Asia*,[6] which was jointly prepared by 13 agencies, under the responsibility of the Regional Coordination Mechanism and regional United Nations Development Group chairs, ECE and UNDP, with contributions from a number of United Nations country teams in the region. The report takes an integrated look at sustainable development in the pan-European region and offers new policy proposals to help manage the needed change to a greener economy with benefits for people throughout the region. The Regional Coordination Mechanism also considered the yearly update by ECE on the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals in Europe and Central Asia; addressed the process for the development of the post-2015 development agenda; and identified the high-priority policy areas and development goals for the region that should be conveyed at the global level discussions.

[6] See http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/publications/oes/RIO_20_Web_Interactif.pdf.

47. During the reporting period, the Regional Coordination Mechanism for the Latin America and Caribbean region produced an inter-agency document, coordinated by ECLAC, that assessed progress and challenges in terms of sustainable development in Latin America and the Caribbean 20 years after the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. The final version of the report, entitled "Sustainable development in Latin America and the Caribbean 20 years on from the Earth Summit: progress, gaps and strategic guidelines", jointly prepared by 21 agencies, was presented at a side event of the third intersessional meeting of the Preparatory Committee for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development on 27 March 2012 at United Nations Headquarters in New York.

48. The meetings of the Regional Coordination Mechanism for Arab States have grown considerably in scope, membership and activities in the past few years. Working closely with the League of Arab States, the regional offices of various United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, as well as civil society networks and funding institutions, the Regional Coordination Mechanism has provided an effective platform to engage this wide group of development actors in discussions of regional development priority areas.

49. The 16th meeting of the Regional Coordination Mechanism for Arab States was held on 25 and 26 November 2011 and was attended by representatives of regional United Nations agencies, other regional organizations, regional banks and international financial institutions. The Regional Coordination Mechanism reviewed the outcome of the Arab preparatory process for Rio+20 and assessed the potential directions and challenges in promoting sustainable development in the region. The meeting recommended the creation of a task force to prepare a guidance note on sustainable development in the context of Rio+20 that would include guidelines for collective thinking on sustainable development goals that reflect the needs and aspirations of the region. In addition, the meeting initiated a productive conversation between the United Nations system in the region and other funding institutions, including the Islamic Development Bank (IDB), around possibilities for coordination of development funding and the potential of an Arab Fund for Development and of closer coordination between the United Nations and IDB.

50. During the reporting period, the Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism held one formal meeting, on 14 October 2011, chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General and held back-to-back with a meeting of the Asia-Pacific United Nations Development Group to enhance synergies. Six ad hoc informal meetings were also held, one of which focused on Asia-Pacific perspectives on the post-2015 United Nations development agenda. The formal meeting, inter alia, highlighted key issues from a regional perspective for input into the November 2011 meeting of the G-20; reviewed and advanced joint preparations for Rio+20; affirmed the commitment of the Regional Coordination Mechanism to the Secretary-General's Every Woman Every Child initiative and reviewed collaboration between the United Nations and ASEAN in the area of disaster management. Key outputs of the Regional Coordination Mechanism during this period included (a) the joint regional assessment of progress in attaining the Millennium Development Goals, coordinated by ESCAP jointly with ADB and UNDP, which ensures a common voice on the Goals in the region and presents a clear plan of action for their achievement; (b) a regional inter-agency publication on Rio+20; and (c) the implementation, at the regional level, of the Secretary-General's UNiTE to End Violence against Women campaign.

2. Enhancing the effectiveness and coherence of United Nations system engagement with non-United Nations regional organizations

51. The regional dimension of development is recognized as being critical for an effective and coordinated response to an ever-growing number of developmental challenges. There has been an acceleration and broadening of regional integration processes and other forms of intraregional cooperation. Many of the key policy actions and policy dialogues to address the impact of the multiple food, fuel and financial crises were initiated at the regional and subregional levels by regional organizations and groupings, which have evolved as important players in determining the development agenda. The regional commissions are actively engaging with the regional processes and frameworks to support development in their respective regions, as outlined below.

52. In Africa, the structure for cooperation at the regional level between the principal non-United Nations regional entity, the African Union, and the United Nations is well-defined. ECA's long-standing cooperation with the African Union Commission and AfDB was further strengthened with the revitalization of the African Union Commission-ECA-AfDB joint secretariat in 2010, which provides the main framework for collaboration among the three premier pan-African institutions. Since 2006, the three regional institutions have continued to strengthen their partnership across the board through active dialogue and consultations and by undertaking joint programmes and activities in various development fields of common interest within the framework of the joint secretariat. ECA has also developed an extensive programme of collaboration with the regional economic communities to foster subregional integration and development on a wide range of issues.

53. There is a long history of collaboration between ECE and the European Union, particularly in the areas of transport of dangerous goods, harmonization of vehicle regulations, rules and regulations on road freight and passenger transport, border-crossing facilitation and the environment. ECE collaborates with OECD on the development, interpretation and harmonized application of agricultural quality standards and supports the review of the implementation of OSCE commitments in the economic and environmental fields, including with respect to energy, in accordance with its expertise and resource availability. There is also considerable cooperation between the ECE and the Eurasian Economic Community, the Eurasian Development Bank, the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation and the Central European Initiative in the areas of agricultural standards, enterprise development, energy efficiency and road safety.

54. ESCAP collaborates closely with such subregional bodies as ASEAN, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the Economic Cooperation Organization, the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation Programme and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. An important component of ESCAP's relationship with ASEAN is the publication, in partnership with the Regional Coordination Mechanism, of *Striving Together: ASEAN and the UN* as a contribution to the United Nations-ASEAN summits held in 2008 and 2010. ESCAP has played a key coordinating and facilitating role in the development of the United Nations-ASEAN partnership, culminating in the adoption, on 19 November 2011, of the Joint Declaration on Comprehensive Partnership between the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the United Nations. The Declaration makes particular reference to ASEAN's close

relationship with ESCAP, including in its capacity as convener of the Regional Coordination Mechanism.

55. In the Latin America and Caribbean region, ECLAC provides support to a number of regional organizations, including MERCOSUR, the Latin American Integration Association, CARICOM, the Union of South American Nations, the Central American Commission on Environment and Development, the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, the Central American Integration System and the Andean Community, through a range of memorandums of understanding and cooperation agreements. Many of these organizations are supported by the intellectual and operative capacities of ECLAC in advancing their own institutional objectives of being regional actors. A concrete example is the contribution made by ECLAC, through the elaboration of a work document and discussion on "Opportunities for convergence and regional cooperation" at the High-level Summit of Latin American and Caribbean States, held in Cancun, Mexico, in 2010, and the two ECLAC-Union of South American Nations joint publications, *UNASUR: A development and cooperation space yet to be built* (July 2011) and *UNASUR: Infrastructure for regional integration* (March 2012).

56. ESCWA and the League of Arab States have an elaborate memorandum of understanding that has a strong emphasis on issues relating to trade and economic development. ESCWA and the League are also working on a new framework for their cooperation in the region structured around a set of core areas including statistics, economic development, trade policy and facilitation, transport, sustainable development, enhancing capacity for climate change adaptation, youth and population issues, and the Millennium Development Goals. The framework will also cover activities to be supported by the Regional Coordination Mechanism, and substantive coordination in preparation for regional or global meetings and events.

57. Despite the significant degree of engagement, the regional commissions acknowledged the need for the entire United Nations system to reflect on its repositioning and interaction with the new regional dynamics, and decided to sponsor a study entitled *The Regional Dimension of Development and the United Nations System*.[7] The study is a system-wide effort and draws upon contributions from more than 20 United Nations organizations.

58. The study documents a significant degree of engagement of United Nations organizations at the regional level, including through more than 150 memorandums of understanding, agreements and other structures of collaboration with more than 30 organizations in all regions. It draws lessons from the challenges and gaps and provides recommendations on ways in which the United Nations system organizations could work together, under the umbrella of the Regional Coordination Mechanism, to provide enhanced support to regional initiatives and priorities. It also highlights the contribution of regionalism as a vital link between global processes and the national level. The study calls for renewed and more coherent engagement by the United Nations system with the regional level and towards that end, proposes that elaborate and in-depth substantive strategies be developed at the regional level, where the United Nations system organizations working together in each region need to coordinate their interventions within an overarching collective strategy of engagement with the partner organizations and stakeholders, bearing in mind

[7] Full study available from http://www.un.org/regionalcommissions/.

regional priorities and specificity. The implementation of these recommendations would further strengthen the existing partnerships between the regional commissions and the non-United Nations regional organizations working in the field of development. It should further leverage the established assets of the regional commissions for the benefit of regional stakeholders and bring the United Nations system together to that end.

C. Interregional cooperation among the regional commissions

59. Since the last reporting period, the Executive Secretaries have held three regular meetings to further strengthen coordination and collaboration among the regional commissions: in July 2011, at the margins of the substantive session of the Economic and Social Council in Geneva; in October 2011, in New York, at the margins of their dialogue with the Second Committee of the General Assembly; and in January 2012, hosted by the Executive Secretary of ESCWA in Beirut, in her capacity as the rotational annual coordinator of the regional commissions. Many of the issues discussed as part of their agenda are addressed in the present report, including the support extended by the regional commissions in respect of United Nations system-wide coherence at the regional and global levels; regional perspectives and contributions towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals and the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015; the promotion of policies that lead to greater inclusion and equity; regional contributions to the Rio+20 process; and regional cooperation as an important tool for development. These issues were addressed as part of the dialogue of the Executive Secretaries with the Council and the Second Committee of the Assembly in July and October 2011, respectively.

60. Participants in a high-level meeting on "Reform and transitions to democracy" organized by ESCWA in Beirut on 15 and 16 January 2012, in partnership with all the regional commissions, tackled issues relating to the challenges facing Arab countries as a result of the awakening in the region. Drawing upon experiences across regions, the participants focused, inter alia, on the short-term economic and social challenges faced by countries in transition; the role of the state in balancing growth and social justice; political participation and electoral reform; the importance of involving young people in the transition process; and prospects for the region as a whole. The meeting was opened by the Secretary-General and the Prime Minister of Lebanon and was attended by a number of former Heads of State and ministers.

61. Coordinated by ESCWA, the regional commissions have initiated the production, in 2013, of a joint publication, entitled "Beyond 2015: A Future United Nations Development Agenda". This report will offer an integrated approach to the formulation of the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015 and will provide the main elements, from a regional perspective, of the development agenda being formulated through an inter-agency process at the global level.

62. The regional commissions will also organize a joint side event at the margins of the Rio+20 conference to highlight the added value of regional approaches in promoting a green economy in the context of poverty eradication through an effective integration of the pillars of sustainable development. The side event will provide an enhanced understanding of the role of the regional commissions as a

unique regional platform for the promotion of sustainable development in their respective regions.

63. In addition, the regional commissions continue to partner in the implementation of a number of interregional development account projects, including those in the areas of trade, transport, sustainable development and social development.